

International

Benazir blames Sharif for missile-related US sanctions

Washington, May 11 - Opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto has blamed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's inept leadership for the slapping of U.S. sanctions against the country's premier research institution after the test-firing of the Ghauri missile.

In a television interview here yesterday, Bhutto claimed Sharif had been unable to defend Pakistan's security interests and as a result sanctions had been slapped on Khan Research Laboratories, according to India Abroad News Service.

To drive her point home, she recalled how during his previous rule Pakistan came on the verge of being declared a terrorist state by the U.S. It was subject to pressure to roll back the country's nuclear programme. "This time when he becomes PM (Prime Minister, we unilaterally sign the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and now new

Media relations specialist to aid Monica Lewinsky

WASHINGTON, May 11: Former White House intern Monica Lewinsky and her family are adding a media relations specialist — a former deputy press secretary to President George Bush — as the investigation of President Bill Clinton reaches a critical phase, reports AP.

Judy Smith, who has worked for investigators in the Iran-Contra scandal and the drug prosecution of Washington Mayor Marion Barry, was beigning her job Monday at the urging of Monica, her father, Dr. Bernard Lewinsky, and her mother, Marcia Lewis.

Monica's lawyer, William Ginsburg, said Sunday night that he is "delighted to have Ms. Smith on board," a move that will allow him and co-counsel Nathaniel Speights "to focus more intently on the legal issues."

Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr recently won an important court victory regarding Monica Lewinsky when a judge ruled there is no immunity agreement that would protect her from prosecution in the investigation.

Vajpayee urged to act tough to make govt perform better

NEW DELHI, May 11: Indian Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has asked Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to act tough to make his fractious coalition perform better, newspapers said today, reports Reuters.

Hegde was quoted as saying in an interview to the private home television channel that he was "not fully satisfied" with the performance of the Hindu nationalist prime minister because he had not asserted himself.

"Where hard decisions have to be taken, one has to assert (oneself)," Hegde said in the interview, which marked a new episode of tensions between allies in the six-week-old coalition.

The statement appeared to revive tensions between southern partners that helped Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) form a minority government in a hung parliament.

"I agree if you say that the prime minister should have asserted himself when unreasonable demands were made. Many people say perhaps he committed

a mistake," said Hegde, a leader of the regional Lok Shakti Party.

The minister did not explain what he meant by unreasonable demands, but he apparently was referring to statements by Jayaram Jayalalitha, leader of the Tamil Nadu state's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party.

The AIADMK is a key ally of the Vajpayee government, which recently pressured Vajpayee to sack Hegde because he faced adverse remarks by a commission probing corruption in his Karnataka state during when he was chief minister.

Jayalalitha made the demand after one of her aides, S R Muthiah, quit the Federal Cabinet while facing charges of having ill-gotten wealth. He denied any wrongdoing.

Hegde, who says he is innocent of any corruption charge, was earlier locked in a tussle with Jayalalitha over demands linked to the sharing of the waters of Cauvery River, which flows from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu.

"We should not say anything unnecessarily which would strain our relationship, particularly with China," Hegde was quoted as saying.

Fernandes said on Sunday that his comments about China, which Beijing protested, had been distorted by the media.

SARNO, Italy, May 11: On one side of town, thousands of residents wept and prayed at a mass funeral for 83 of their dead. On the other, rescue workers dug through layer after layer of hardened mud and debris searching for the dozens still feared buried, reports AP.

On Monday, six days after torrential rains sent rivers of mud barreling down Mount Sarno, destroying everything in their path, the death toll stood at 124. All but 16 were from Sarno.

Loaded on the back of army trucks, 83 flower-laden coffins moved in a funeral procession Sunday toward the outdoor soccer stadium where Sarno's bishop celebrated mass. Among them was the tiny white coffin of Sarno's youngest victim, a 3-month-old infant.

Mourners wailed and clutched in desperation at the passing bodies of loved ones.

The victims had to be buried in the town's newer cemetery because the old one lies buried under four-meters (13 feet) of sludge.

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"I think the Secretary General has always been used as a scapegoat. We serve as an alibi for member states and for leaders. But I think we have to be careful to some extent about using the UN as a scapegoat for responsibilities and actions, or inactions, that belong elsewhere, because after a while it is no longer credible," Annan said.

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Asked at the end of his eighth nation African tour, whether the tour would influence the contents of a report he presented to the Security Council in April on conflict management in Africa, Annan said not.

"What I have seen validates my report. What also encouraged me was the reaction of heads of states. Two of them said, 'let's try and attend to a document of action, so we can

make a follow-through and they are enthusiastic about it,' he said.

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